

## CASA of Montana

CASA of Montana is a network of 15 local CASA/GAL offices throughout Montana. These programs provide trained volunteers as advocates to children in about 50 percent of the abuse/neglect cases in the state. Court Appointed Special Advocate programs cover 37 out of 56 counties. Judges appoint these volunteers to investigate the child's situation and report back to the court.

- Fifteen Montana programs in 37 counties provide more than 400 trained volunteers, serving over 22,433 hours a year on behalf of abused and neglected children in the year ending Dec. 31, 2006. At \$60 an hour, the amount paid to an attorney when a CASA is not available, that volunteer time is valued at more than \$1 million.
- CASA volunteers advocate for more than 1,000 children, about half of the 2,100 children in foster care.
- All these programs operate on about \$680,000 this year, with about \$117,000 coming from the state courts in 2006 for reimbursement at \$400 per case. NCASA grants provided \$60,000 for a combination of start up and expansion funding in the last calendar year. Only three of the local programs receive NCASA grant funding, typically as seed money that must be replaced by other sources of funding. Counties provided \$47,000 and most programs depend heavily on local fundraising, private grants and contributions from individuals and civic groups.
- In lieu of the \$400 per case payment currently made to CASA programs, the Supreme Court is requesting \$300,000 for FY 2008 and 2009 budget to support the work of local CASA programs. (House Bill 2 under Judiciary) The funds are needed to provide stability in staffing CASA offices to support and recruit volunteers and to encourage expansion.
- Under this budget proposal, each large urban program would receive \$23,700 for salary and operation while a small rural program would receive \$11,700.
- Each local program recruits, screens, trains and supervises volunteers. Volunteers must pass a criminal background check, a reference check and a Child Protective Services check.
- New volunteers receive 30 hours of training based on a NCASA curriculum and 12 hours of continuing education each year.
- Each local program must pass a self-assessment and quality assurance evaluation administered by National CASA. Most local programs in Montana have passed this evaluation. CASA of Montana also must pass a self-assessment and quality assurance evaluation administered by NCASA. CASA of Montana has almost completed work on its quality assurance evaluation.
- CASA of Montana and the local programs are committed to high quality volunteer advocacy for children. State and federal statutes require a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) to be assigned to each child in care. The hours of time spent fundraising by local programs could be better used in recruiting, training and supervising volunteers for more children in Montana.
- Of the 500 people involved in the statewide CASA network, there are only 20 paid positions, most of which are part time. Paid program directors are needed to sustain programs and manage volunteers.